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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IR](#) [KU](#) [KUWAIT](#) [IRAN](#) [RELATIONS](#)  
SUBJECT: KUWAITIS SHARE CONCERN ABOUT IRAN; URGE POLITICAL  
SOLUTION

REF: A. KUWAIT 2883  
[1](#)B. KUWAIT 2855

KUWAIT 00003740 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Ambassador Richard LeBaron for reason 1.4 (d)

[1](#)1. (C/NF) Summary and comment: On September 16, the Ambassador hosted a roundtable lunch with a number of leading academics, political leaders, and Kuwaiti Shi'a politicians to hear their views on Iran. The group agreed that President Ahmadinejad's economic policies had largely failed, but felt he had succeeded in rallying Iranians around the nuclear issue. Many guests lamented the lack of a clear, unified GCC strategy towards Iran, which a member of the GCC Advisory Committee blamed on divisions within the GCC. One guest noted the difficulty of separating U.S. concerns over Iran's nuclear program from U.S. support for Israel. These two issues are linked in the eyes of Arab publics, he argued. All the guests emphasized the need to find a political solution to the tensions with Iran, arguing that any military confrontation would be "disastrous" for the region. End summary.

[1](#)2. (C/NF) During a September 16 lunch hosted by the Ambassador, a diverse group of high-level Embassy contacts shared their views on Iran, specifically Iranian influence on the Gulf and the motivations of the Iranian regime. Chairman of the Political Science Department at Kuwait University Dr. Abdul Reda Assiri, who recently traveled to Iran, said average Iranians were less optimistic about their future today than a year ago, a development he blamed on President Ahmadinejad's failed economic policies. Ahmadinejad's "one success," though, was uniting the Iranian people around the nuclear issue, he said. Dr. Mohammed Al-Rumaihi, a distinguished academic and Advisor to the Prime Minister, agreed, arguing that Ahmadinejad had used the nuclear issue to "galvanize" Iran's population and strengthen the influence of the hard-liners within the regime. Dr. Moudhi Al-Hamoud, the President of Arab Open University, urged "more positive engagement" with Iran, led by the Europeans. American pressure on Iran was often counter-productive and only served to strengthen the position of the hard-liners at the expense of more "moderate" voices, she contended.

GCC Lacks Clear Strategy on Iran  
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[1](#)3. (C/NF) A number of the guests lamented the lack of a clear, unified Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) strategy towards Iran. Although the GCC of necessity relies on the international community, specifically the U.S., to deal with the Iranian threat, Gulf countries need to play a more active role in confronting Iran, they argued. Jassem Al-Nisif, one

of Kuwait's five GCC Advisory Committee members, blamed divisions within the GCC for the absence of a unified strategy. Dr. Assiri said this lack of strategy put Arab countries at a disadvantage when dealing with Iran, which had a clear regional agenda. Ali Al-Tameemi, the former Chairman of the Kuwait Economic Society, said Gulf countries needed to be particularly aware of potential Iranian efforts to undermine their internal "social cohesion" and should devise a strategy for dealing with domestic tensions. Al-Tameemi believed Iran had demonstrated this capability during the recent pro-Hizballah rallies in Kuwait (reftels) and warned of Iranian "proxies" operating in Kuwait and elsewhere in the GCC.

#### The Israel Factor

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¶4. (C/NF) Abdul Mohsen Taqi Muzaffar, the former Secretary General of the Kuwait Democratic Forum (KDF), a liberal political association, stressed the need to "neutralize" the Israel factor when dealing with Iran. Many people in the Arab world believe the U.S.'s primary objective in confronting Iran over its nuclear program is to protect Israel, rather than its Gulf allies, he said. Until the U.S. adopts a more balanced policy on Israeli-Palestinian issues, Arab publics will continue to view U.S. policy towards Iran through the prism of U.S. support for Israel, Muzaffar concluded. Dr. Assiri argued that the Arab world is divided between those that support Iran's acquisition of nuclear weapons as a balance to Israel and those in the Gulf whose opinions range from indifferent to genuinely fearing a nuclear-armed Iran.

#### Hizballah: If at First You Don't Succeed

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¶5. (C/NF) Dr. Assiri argued that Iran's efforts to increase

KUWAIT 00003740 002.2 OF 002

its influence in Lebanon through the recent Israel-Hizballah conflict had largely failed. Dr. Shafeeq Ghabra, the former President of the American University of Kuwait, said Iran might actually lose influence if Hizballah was effectively marginalized in the Lebanese political system as a result of its adventurism. Several other guests seemed to agree with this analysis. They warned, however, that Iran was trying to apply the Hizballah model -- gaining influence through charitable giving and community services -- in Iraq. They feared Iran might also try to similarly gain influence in Gulf countries.

#### Political Solution the Only Solution

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¶6. (C/NF) Dr. Al-Hamoud claimed Kuwaitis were very concerned about the possibility of a conflict over Iran's nuclear program, but nonetheless stressed the need for the international community to keep pressure on the Iranian regime, saying, "Iran needs to feel the heat." Most of the guests agreed, however, that economic sanctions on Iran would be largely ineffective. Dr. Rumaihi argued that Iran was perfectly happy to be an enemy of the U.S., a position the regime used to increase its influence both domestically and internationally.

¶7. (C/NF) All the guests stressed the need to find a political solution to the tensions with Iran and argued that any military conflict would be "disastrous" for the region. If it is attacked, "Iran will not hesitate to use the considerable means at its disposal against U.S. interests in the region," former (Shi'a) Planning Minister Ali Al-Mousa said. He added: "And we (in the Gulf) will not be immune from attack." Dr. Assiri echoed this view: "Iran doesn't need nuclear weapons to threaten us. It's conventional capabilities are threatening enough." Dr. Ghabra agreed, saying, "We cannot live through another war." The U.S.

should allow time for domestic political change in Iran, the  
guests argued.

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LeBaron